DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 298 708 EC 210 642

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TITLE Cultural and Acculturational Commonalities and Diversities among Asian Americans: Identification and Programming Considerations.
PUB DATE 88
NOTE 11p.; In: Schools and the Culturally Diverse Exceptional Student: Promising Practices and Future Directions; see EC 210 633. Paper presented at the Ethnic and Multicultural Symposia (Dallas, TX, 1986).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Viewpoints (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Asian Americans; Cultural Differences; Cultural Influences; *Disabilities; Elementary Secondary Education; *Ethnic Groups; *Family Involvement; *Handicap Identification; *Program Development; Student Characteristics

ABSTRACT

The paper, originally given at a 1986 Ethnic and Multicultural Symposium, attempts to provide a practical frame of reference for understanding and appreciating the similarities and differences among Asian Americans. Discussed are immigration and settlement history as well as acculturation (types of acculturation and factors influencing acculturation). The current cultural and socioeconomic status of Asian Americans is noted. Commonalities in the areas of experiential background and minority status, world views, values, beliefs, lifestyles, traditions, and customs are identified. These characteristics are related to improved special education identification, programming, and family involvement. (DB)

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Cultural and Acculturational Commonalities and Diversities Among Asian Americans: Identification and Programming Considerations

Esther K. Leung

Asian Americans are a relatively small minority group in the United States, constituting about 2% of the total population. They have often been stereotyped, perhaps due to readily distinguishable outward appearance such as skin color and physical features. Yet they are an extremely diversified conglomerate of various Asiatic ethnicities, sometimes sharing only minority status. Contributing to the differences among Asian groups is their cultural and acculturational variance; while they are distinguished from other majority and minority groups by their shared cultural and acculturational variables. The purpose of this paper is to delineate some of these commonalities and diversities, to enhance special educators' sensitivity to and understanding of Asian minorities, and to present some suggestions for identification and programming.

DIVERSITIES AND COMPLEXITIES

Asian Americans differ in origin, immigration and settlement history, degree and type of acculturation, and current status.

Origin

Asian Americans came from Asia, which spans the Indian subcontinent, the Malay Peninsula and Archipelago, Southeast Asia, East Asia, and the Japanese and Pacific islands; it comprises 23–29 political entities (Chan, 1986; Cheung, 1985a), including Pakistan, India, Afghanistan, the Philippines, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Singapore, Malaysia, Burma, Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Korea, Japan, Guam, and tribal groups like the Hmong, Meow, and Khmer in Southeast Asia.

Asians speak over 1,000 languages and dialects. Most have long established histories and cultures ranging from primitive to technical-industrial, and economies from dire impoverishment to the world's foremost exporter and creditor. Asian governments include democracy and totalitarianism. Asia is the birthplace of four of the world's seven leading religions: Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism; its people also practice atheism, animism, shamanism, Shintoism, Islam, and Christianity.

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Immigration and Settlement History

Most Asians migrated to the U.S. through immigration and refugee processes. However, their histories and experiences are dissimilar.

Immigrants. *Early immigrants* came to the United States before World War II. Many were uneducated and of low socioeconomic status. They came as Chinese laborers, Japanese farmers, and Asian Indian merchants. As targets of discrimination and harsh treatment, they often clung together for support and protection, forming ethnic centers such as "Chinatowns" in metropolises.

Recent immigrants came after World War II, as students, professionals, entrepreneurs, and friends and relatives of older immigrants. Many are quite successful socially and economically, with no painful experience of vicious discrimination. They include a higher percentage of Filipinos, Indochinese, and Koreans (Butterfield, 1986); they have diverse settlement patterns. Usually they have settled near jobs and educational opportunities, although many still flock around highly concentrated ethnic centers.

Refugees. A number of Chinese and Koreans were admitted to the U.S. as refugees from Communism in the 1940s and 1950s. However, the bulk of refugees are from Southeast Asia, and emigrated as a result of the Vietnam War. Many of them are young, having come in the 1975 wave immediately after the fall of Saigon and the 1978–1981 wave when the Communists forced out their "undesirable" citizens. The first wave included the "baby-lift" children who came to live with foster parents. The second wave (1978–1981) refugees comprise a complex group, including the "boat people" who had to survive Communist gunfire, pirates, the treacherous seas, and lengthy waits in refugee camps for resettlement. Some had already lived through the trauma of wars, guerrillas, occupation, and prison camps prior to their journey. Schooling and other niceties may have completely eluded them. Many may have been permanently scarred by the hardships and cruelties of war and refuge. Subsequent development of young refugees and children of refugees in the U.S. may be linked to those experiences. There are determined and appreciative high academic achievers, and there are youthful combat-experienced gangs who have terrorized Asian American communities (Glamser & Myers, 1987; Owen, 1985).

The second wave refugees included the Laos, Kmer, Hmongs, and other tribal people who fled their homelands after Cambodia and Laos fell to Communism. Some of these tribes have no written language.

The settlement history of the Southeast Asian refugees is rather unusual. The youngsters who came in the first wave generally ended up in adoptive or foster homes with American parents. Many in the second wave had to wait for months or years in refugee camps before admission to this country. Once here, they were often sent to isolated parts of the United States, away from metropolitan areas where Asian Americans congregate. Amidst strange people and culture, and having to cope with adjustment and adaptation within, as well as misunderstanding or hostility without, many Southeast Asian refugees found initial settlement turbulent at best. Many eventually trickled back to urban centers to be near their kin.

Acculturation

Acculturation refers to Asian-American immigrants' adaptation to and adoption of mainstream American culture. The degree and effects of acculturation differ.

Types of Acculturation. There are several distinguishable acculturational patterns among immigrants (Lin & Masuda, 1983).

1. *Marginality* includes immigrants at the juncture of two cultures, no longer adhering to their "old" Asian values, nor having adopted the "new" American system. Without a definite conduct code, they may (a) develop such high levels of anxiety or depression that they become neurotic or paralyzed in their personal and social functions; or (b) ignore the dictates

of both cultures and become deviates and thus social rejects, with increasing feelings of alienation among their own ethnic group and/or in society at large.

2. *Traditionalism* generally involves older or adult immigrants who are aware of cultural differences. They may at first vacillate between the "old" ethnic and the "new" American cultures; however, when forced to choose identity, they feel more comfortable sticking to their old ways of life.
3. *Overacculturation* occurs most frequently among the young. Growing up in American culture and being socialized through schooling, many young Asians consciously or unconsciously reject their ethnic culture, and become extremely if not totally Americanized in order to join the mainstream.
4. *Biculturation* occurs when immigrants integrate both cultures and function efficiently in either setting. Cheung (1985a) called it functional acculturation, the optimal adaptation and adjustment, when minority immigrants are comfortable in both cultural environments, making progress in mainstream society without totally abandoning their ethnic identity. Biculturation enriches and enhances development and achievement. However, bicultural immigrants do at times experience conflicts, divided loyalty, a sense of loss, and problems of identity.

Factors Influencing Acculturation. The degree and type of acculturation depend on the following factors:

1. *Time*. Time diffuses the link to and the practices of one's old ways of life. The longer a family has been settled in America, the more "American" the members tend to be. Thus first generations tend to be steeped in ethnic views and traditions which are gradually abandoned or modified with succeeding generations (Lum & Char, 1985).
2. *Proximity*. Physical and social proximity to one's old culture and ethnic group deters acculturation. Asian Americans who live in or near metropolitan areas with a high ratio of their ethnic group tend to retain their ethnic identification longer.

   By contrast Asian Americans in small towns lack opportunities to socialize with ethnic members and to keep up with ethnic culture. Both adults and children in such a setting may have to Americanize quickly to sustain economic, social, and educational activities to avoid rejection and isolation. Hence "overacculturation" and "marginality" are common.

   "Marginality" and "overacculturation" also occur among Asians in close physical or social proximity to their ethnic groups, if there is undue pressure to conform to either culture. However, frequent association tends to encourage "traditionalism," which is one way to avoid adjustment problems.
3. *Age*. Because young people can adapt to another culture more readily than their elders, the generation gap in immigrant families may be compounded by a cultural gap. In addition to clashing values and behavior codes, some families are caught unprepared for role reversals. A family's more acculturated youngsters may have to assume financial and social responsibilities. Such contradictions to tradition may upset the family equilibrium, resulting in grave adjustment problems for everybody concerned (Morales, 1983).
4. *Birthplace*. Asians born and/or raised in the U.S. are easily initiated into the "American" way through the public school and the peer group. Schooling and early association with American peers affect the pace, magnitude, and the nature of acculturation.

   Generally speaking, as Asian children enter school and begin a prolonged association with mainstream American peers, they may experience culture shock, if their home environment is not Americanized. They may come to a sudden realization of their minority status, epitomized by their skin color, physical features, and linguistic difference. They must cope with the often conflicting and stressful demands from school, community, and home environments (Leung, 1981). Generally, children with inadequate social skills or unfavorable home/school/community environments may end up marginally acculturated. Those with adequate social skills but too much sensitivity to minority status may become

overacculturated, while those not impeded by personal inadequacy nor environmental predicament may achieve biculturalism.

5. *Sex*. Asian females are more readily acculturated than males (Fong, 1973). Women may be conditioned to adapt to new environments; Asian women could have more to gain by forsaking male-dominant Asian cultures. In many first-generation homes, the wives and daughters tend to Americanize sooner, and are more likely to be either overacculturated or bicultural; husbands and sons are more likely to be traditional or even marginal.
6. *Intermarriage*. Acculturation accelerates in intermarriages. Most couples do not share identical culture, custom, and native tongue. They therefore generally adopt English as the functional language and contemporary American standards for child-rearing practices.

Current Cultural and Socioeconomic Status

Asian Americans are extremely diverse in contemporary American cultural and socioeconomic dimensions. They differ in:

Education. Asian Americans range from illiterates to Nobel laureates, from high academic achievers to dropouts. Because Asian Americans value education, a high proportion of their young finish high school and go on to higher education.

Language. Asian Americans may be monolingual or bilingual. The monolinguals may only speak (and write) in their own tongue or English. The bilinguals may have proficiency in both English and their native tongue, or only minimal competency in one or both languages.

Social and Economic Status. Certain groups of Asian Americans have increasingly attained middle-class status, though in general they still range from poverty to extreme affluence. The poor tend to be recent immigrants and refugees, who came with little or no wealth, education, and English proficiency (Chinn & Plata, 1986).

COMMONALITIES

Amid diversities, there exist distinct commonalities among Asian Americans, especially among those of East and Southeast Asian origin. They include the following:

Experiential Background and Minority Status

Experience related to minority status is shared by all Asian Americans and indeed all minorities. In addition to feeling a sense of inadequacy or inferiority inherent to the awareness of deviance, minorities may encounter discrimination intentionally or unintentionally imposed on them. These subjective and objective experiences forge a bond among all minorities. This bond is further strengthened among Asians by their similar physical attributes, culture, and migration, settlement, and acculturation history.

Culture

The dominance of Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism, the religious-philosophic systems that undergird all facets of Asian life, contributes to the resemblance evident in Asian Americans' world views, ethics, social norms, values, folk beliefs, and lifestyles. Some understanding of these systems is therefore prerequisite to appreciating their cultural commonalities. (For an in-depth presentation see Leung, 1987).

World Views. The preeminent Asian views on the world and life are based on the teachings of Confucius, Lao Tzu, and Buddha Gautama. They began as philosophy, but evolved into religious systems. Each has its unique emphasis, with Confucianism social-political, Taoism philosophical, and Buddhism personal. However, they are mutually compatible and

complementary, enabling Asians to integrate and entertain complex mixes of thoughts and faiths.

1. *Confucianism*. Confucius (551–479 B.C.) and followers stress ethics as the key to harmony and prosperity. In Confucius' feudalistic world, the Supreme Ruler of the spiritual realm destined earthly rulers to lead and to care for earthlings. Rulers were to nurture the masses for Heaven's sake, providing for their physical needs and serving as their conduct models.

   Confucianism also believes that the spirits of the deceased, especially those of one's ancestors, are to be revered and appeased. The head of each household must maintain a proper relationship between their families and their ancestry, just as rulers between their subjects and Heaven. Family heads are also responsible for feeding and educating their dependents by exemplary words and deeds.

2. *Taoism*. Lao Tzu (604–? B.C.) advocated the cultivation of inner strength, selflessness, spontaneity, and harmony with nature and man, rather than Confucius' group-oriented propriety and conduct codes. He also explained natural and social phenomena by incorporating the ancient theory of cyclical counterbalancing forces of Yang and Yin. Because of its mystical approach, Taoism soon turned into superstition, magic, divination, sorcery, and necromancy among the illiterate. As these mystical practices are similar to and compatible with animism, Popular Taoism has been widely accepted and perpetuated by the masses.

   But Taoism at its best is purely philosophic. It has deeply influenced the Asian character, shaping it towards serenity, simplicity, meekness, and tolerance, with an inner core of strength, suppleness, and creativity (Smith, 1965).

3. *Buddhism*. Buddhism was begun in India by Prince Gautama (560–480 B.C.). Its goal is for humans to attain "enlightenment" to realize "Nirvana," an altered state of awareness when all sufferings are transcended and the pains of birth, aging, sickness, death, and separation can no longer be felt. Motivated by compassion, Buddha took his message to the populace. Buddhism as such is very therapeutic and essentially empirical (Smith, 1965); it has drawn huge followings, first in India, then throughout Asia. Buddhist outlook is therefore very pervasive in Asia. Buddhism in the form of Zen, which stresses Taoistic meditation, is especially popular in Japan.

Values, Beliefs, Lifestyles, Traditions, and Customs. Asian Americans share many values, beliefs, lifestyles, traditions, and customs (Cheung, 1985a; Morales, 1983; Tseng & Wu, 1985). The degree of similarity is inversely proportional to the level of acculturation. Thus the cultural similarity among Asian Americans is really a reflection of the similarity among Asian cultures, embedded not only in religion and philosophy but also in history of civilization, economy, and social-political structure.

Most Asian nations have long histories of civilization which differs from the West in orientation. Their concepts and practices may indeed be rooted in antiquity, and sometimes entail unscientific or erroneous notions. But they are by no means categorically underdeveloped or primitive.

Asian countries have been basically agrarian. Customs and traditions are therefore geared toward agricultural productivity and become meaningful in that light. Industrialization came late to Asian countries. Nowadays, bright Asian youths overwhelmingly embrace science and technology, a trend mirrored by Asian Americans.

Asian societies have not been democratic in the European-American model. There is usually an elite ruling class, aided by scholars or religious professionals. Authoritarianism characterizes social relationship, which is still the norm in Asian American communities, mainly among the old and the less acculturated.

Several unique Asian values, beliefs, and lifestyles are prominent in countries dominated by Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism. They still influence the attitudes and behaviors of Asian Americans from such countries, depending on the level of acculturation.

1. *Family and Ethics.* Asian families are close-knit, extended, patrilineal, hierarchical and authoritarian (Cheung, 1985b). A large family with plenty of male farm hands, or an extended family that compensates for small family size, are advantageous in agrarian society where collaboration is crucial for survival. The extended family and family influence have gradually expanded to include entire clans, villages and far-reaching kinship networks; while mutual dependence evolved to an art and virtue. Social obligation and responsibility have likewise extended to state, nation, and the universe. Asians are thus basically group centered rather than individualistic, with exact codes governing social interactions.

   The reciprocity of Confucius' ethics leads to filial piety. Besides owing their elders respect, loyalty, and obedience, the younger generation must care for them in their old age, to reciprocate the kindness their elders have bestowed on them. Filial piety also promotes the respect of age. In traditional extended families, the oldest generation rules.

   "Saving face" is another outgrowth of filial piety. As bringing honor to one's parents, elders, and ancestors is a duty, one must always consider one's family or group and avoid bringing shame to them. Moreover, one must try to save face or honor if one is in danger of discredit, even through death. One would not disgrace others by embarrassing them before outsiders. Not admitting problems, not talking directly about concerns, not confronting issues and people, and doing business through a third party are some of the means to prevent losing face.

2. *Education, Morals, and Society.* The family has been the primary socializing agent in Asia, as public school is not universal. Confucius emphasizes the moral aspect of education; parents are to teach their children to be upright and proper primarily by their own examples. Indecorous children imply irresponsible parents.

   Traditionally, education has become a means of upward mobility. For years scholars ranked highest in China's social scale regardless of their economic status.

   The reverence and status conferred on teachers and the social significance of scholarship have firmly established the value of education in China and other Asian countries. To traditionally responsible parents, nothing is too great a sacrifice to secure a good education for their deserving children. Scholastic achievement, on the other hand, is the greatest tribute one could bring to one's parents and family.

3. *Other Values and Personality Characteristics.* Other values and beliefs have left indelible marks on Asian personality and behaviors. Again, they are intricately related to Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism.

   Moderation, harmony, and peace are prized in social relations and as one interacts with nature. Dissonance and disagreement should be resolved through mediation and concessions. Confrontation with issues and problems are avoided, as they may subside or dissipate over time. Often, moderation and harmony are maintained at the cost of personal mental health and the integrity of the nuclear family.

   Because caution, conservativeness, and compliance are valued in Asian cultures, traditional Asians may appear to be indecisive, timid, overconforming, and unassertive by American standards.

   Confucianism emphasizes verbal, social, and emotional restraint, while Taoists and Buddhists believe that meditation transcends language, reason, and emotion. In essence, reticence is a virtue, as is moderation in emotion and ambition. Neither excessive nor public display of feelings is appropriate; one demonstrates affection by caring and providing, not by words and physical acts of endearment. Apparently, much self-control and temperance is exerted daily by Asians, a clue to their rather high incidence of "mild" neurotic depressive (Lin, 1985). Paradoxically, these values and lifestyle may also contribute to their inner strength and resilience.

   Asian culture also values endurance, tolerance, and accommodation. Asians may fatalistically accept adversities as consequences of past sins or bad luck. Thus resigned, few

would orchestrate concerted efforts to bear upon problems and misfortunes such as handicapped children. Instead, they adapt or accommodate.

Other Asian virtues include hard work and responsibility, meekness and modesty, loyalty, pragmatism, and realism. They are valued and practiced by many Asians in America, although they are not always appreciated by contemporary mainstream Americans.

IMPLICATIONS

Asian Americans comprise a heterogenous minority group. They are of Asiatic origin, but have diverse geographic, linguistic, political, and cultural affiliations, as well as a myriad of socioeconomic and experiential backgrounds prior to and following their migration to the U.S. Ranging from generations of citizenship to recent immigrants, they also vary in their degree of acculturation. Many Asian Americans prosper here, but there are others who hover around poverty, uncertainty, and impotence, unable to cope with problems and anxieties related to migration and acculturation. Among preschool and school-aged Asian Americans, there is a wide spectrum of human potentials, behaviors, extent of acculturation, English proficiency, schooling experience, and family and socioeconomic conditions that may significantly affect the rate and state of learning and performance.

Asian Americans do share commonalities. The foremost is the minority status and its associated experience, which is similar to and understood by all minority group members. Then, among Asians whose long history of ethnic cultures are rooted philosophically in Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism, and socially in a basic agronomic economy, there are unmistakable common outlooks, values, beliefs, lifestyles, traditions, and customs. The most noticeable ones relate to family, ethics, education, responsibility, industry, endurance, restraint, moderation, modesty, and loyalty. Yet mingling with these ideals is the reality of shrewdness, materialism, superstition, and ignorance which may be unavoidable in the masses of humanity constrained by limited resources and education.

Some implications of the above on special education for handicapped Asian Americans are in the areas of identification, programming, and family involvement.

Identification

There are handicapped Asian Americans. Contrary to recent publicity on Asian students' academic feats, they are not all gifted nor even normal youngsters. Rather, they have their proportions of intellectual, social, and psychomotor deviances (Tseng & Wu, 1985). In some cases, anomalies may have been masked, confounded, or compounded by cultural differences on the part of the Asians and by misconceptions on the part of professionals.

Take the case of intellectual performance. Some Asian students tend to achieve academically at a very high level because of their cultural emphasis on education, industry, responsibility, and family honors. Even the slowest students may be pushed to their limit; mental retardation or learning disabilities, though existing, may not be readily suspected by professionals nor admitted by parents and students. Thus some students may miss the opportunity of an appropriate education to meet their unique needs due to specific cognitive disorders.

On the other hand, culturally different behaviors such as nonassertiveness, reticence, modesty, and self-deprecation may cloud perception of ability; because of English deficiency, inadequate schooling, and traumatic migration/settlement experiences which may interfere with academic performance, some Asian students may be misidentified as having intellectual disabilities. Caution must be exercised, therefore, in assessment and consequent intervention, if warranted. Some problematic Asian learners need appropriate services such as language, remedial education, counseling, and social or emotional skills for survival in American classroom and society, rather than inappropriate special education for the mentally disabled. With this in mind, evaluation to determine eligibility for special education must do more than

ensure that the item content of the assessment instruments is familiar to the testees and that assessment is conducted in the native tongue. The cultural and acculturational background of both the student and family must be a consideration in the selection of appropriate assessment procedures and instruments and the interpretation of scores derived from such instruments.

Asian Americans have been underserved in mental health services aimed at social and emotional handicaps (Cheung, 1985a; Tseng & Wu, 1985). The stigma of being deviant or mentally "sick" and the difficulty of distinguishing social and emotional disorders from common human phenomena are the major reasons for the underidentification and underrepresentation of Asian students in behavioral- or emotional-disordered classes. Furthermore, many Asians are conditioned to be compliant, reserved, restrained, modest, and moderate in their verbal and nonverbal behaviors. Emotional distress may not be noted nor tended as such until it has surfaced as severe psychosomatic symptoms. Even at the diagnostic stage such distress may not be identified.

Another problematic area in the affective domain relates to recent Southeast Asian immigrants and refugees. A high percentage of them are school-aged. While many have the ability and the incentive to become remarkable scholars, some of them also harbor tremendous emotional problems because of wartime, refuge, and settlement experiences (Carlin, 1983). They may become, if they are not already candidates for special education in the areas of behavioral disorders and/or emotional disturbance. Again, their customary demeanors may have disguised them, preventing them from having their problems discovered and receiving timely intervention. Unfortunately, there is no easy formula to improve the identification of behavioral/emotional handicaps among Asians. Perhaps the only way is through the trained eyes of professionals who are cognizant of the complex Asian American cultural and acculturational situations and ramifications, who have won their clients' respect and confidence, and who could therefore more readily differentiate disabilities from culture-specific demeanors.

Culture may also affect the identification and treatment of Asians with physical or sensory impairments. For example, ignorance and the face-saving tradition which might keep parents from realizing and acknowledging cognitive and affective deficits, could have a similar effect on psychomotor dysfunctions. Parents may resort to magic and superstition to "cure" a physically handicapped child, thus keeping him/her from early identification and early intervention. They may choose to ignore, endure, tolerate, or accommodate handicaps on philosophical, religious, or superstitious grounds. Not only are handicapping conditions not corrected, remediated, or alleviated, but other interrelated and secondary disabilities may develop because of delayed action. Again, knowledgeable and trusted professionals will be capable of discerning risks and disorders, and assisting families to seek early treatment.

Programming

Programming for Asian Americans' handicaps should be culturally and acculturationally relevant. As with other minority groups, professionals are ethically responsible for students' educational, emotional, and social needs in their home and ethno-cultural environment; as well as their acceptance by and ability to function effectively in school and mainstream society. For instance, a teacher may plan to modify the "low self-concept" of an Asian student who frequently emits self-berating remarks, refuses to attempt new tasks, and gives up too easily on school assignments. However, the parents may be very conservative, modeling self-effacement and insisting on modesty at home and in their ethnic social circle. A program that considers both the youngster's emotional and social needs would teach and foster appreciation of what each cultural system values, then help the youngster acquire and maintain appropriate behaviors specific to each setting.

Indeed, self-concept, emotional well-being, or social skills—call it what you will—should be of major concern in the education of minority students in general and Asian Americans in particular, for reasons that have been discussed in this chapter. Because a learner's cognitive,

affective, and physical conditions are inextricably related, minority students who tend to endure stress and anxiety in their growing years are vulnerable socially and emotionally; this vulnerability may impede their other areas of learning and growth. Therefore, concerned educators should provide supportive, preventive, or corrective measures to promote minority students' healthy emotional and social development.

Useful measures include open discussion about cultures or minority status; counseling (Alley & Deshler, 1979); peer support groups; simulation activities to develop insight and empathy; bibliotherapy; curricular units on minority cultures and cultural events; and involving parents and minority persons in academic and extracurricular programs. Seeing family members, role models, or prestigious people in one's ethnic group amidst one's peers and teachers is especially inspiring to youngsters in identity crisis. However, the measures themselves are not as crucial as the attitudes of the significant others. Educators who can subscribe to the notion that Asian values and traditions are not inferior to Euro-American cultures, and who know what it takes to function efficiently in both the mainstream and the ethnic environment, can program for Asian Americans to help them achieve successful functional acculturation.

Family Involvement

Most Asian Americans respect authority and value education. Parental cooperation with educators is seldom a problem. Real collaboration, however, may be difficult to achieve. Out of respect for education and educators, Asian parents are likely to listen carefully and acknowledge affirmatively whatever teachers say. But attention and affirmation may only mean courtesy and propriety; parents do not wish to contradict the authority figures and cause them to lose face. Therefore a "yes" is not equivalent to a promise of adherence to the counsel or direction, especially if it is at odds with the Asian's knowledge base, belief, or value system. Moreover, when matters concern the external affairs of the family or clan, counsel and approval must come through other chains of command. Final authority often rests with the father of the household, the grandparents of the extended family, or the elders of the clan (Morales, 1983).

Even when approval is certain, a teacher who is a stranger and who has not demonstrated understanding of Asians in general and the family involved in particular may still be respected at a distance. The teacher's counsel and opinion regarding a handicapped child may not be accepted and followed through by the family. Trust occurs when contact with the teacher or professional has been initiated or affirmed through the networking of friends and relatives, or when familiarity has been developed. When there is trust, compliance will be almost guaranteed. To achieve collaboration, then, teachers and professionals must win trust through acquaintance, credentials, and sensitivity. Credentials may be gained by virtue of one's position, accomplishments, performance, or by word-of-mouth. Sensitivity will develop only from a nonbiased attitude and adequate knowledge about the Asian Americans.

Beyond collaboration, teachers and authority figures should also anticipate loyalty and the intention of establishing a permanent obligatory relationship. This should not be mistaken for an inclination toward dependence. Asians simply tend to "revere" teachers and to remember their benefactors. Moreover, Asians establish horizontal relationships only with those who do not impose their authority, knowledge, and value systems on them. Therefore, if special educators really desire mutual collaboration and open communication with Asian American parents, they must cultivate friendly relationships just as Asians would among themselves, by being modest, faithful, and above all, trustworthy or confidential in terms of keeping family secrets from "outsiders."

Finally, in involving the family, professionals must not forget about Asian family structure and ethics. In traditional and extended families, consistency in interventions for handicapped youngsters can be achieved only when the whole family, especially those in authority positions, agree to participate. In other words, if grandparents live in the same household, they too, must understand and cooperate in the implementation of a school-home or center-home program.

CONCLUSION

Some cultural and acculturational commonalities and diversities among a very small yet extremely complex minority, the Asian Americans, have been delineated in this chapter. Their implications on the identification, programming, and family involvement of handicapped Asian youngsters have also been discussed. As in all special education situations, systematic individualization from preplacement evaluation to program implementation is the only way to enhance accurate identification and appropriate services. A thorough understanding of the cultural and acculturational backgrounds of the Asian Americans as a group and specific handicapped Asians individually is imperative for successful effective individualization (Leung, 1987).

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